

My name is Photios Dalamagas and I live in Avon. I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to speak today. Throughout the day we have been hearing testimonies of citizens feeling abused by the family court system. This should not come as a surprise since it is designed to be an adversarial system. The goal is to attack the opponent, to abuse the opponent and try to prolong the process and financial exploitation, without any regard to the financial and emotional well being of the family and especially children. It is clear from today's testimonies that the system is broken, abusive and corrupt. Collusion, individual agendas and favoritism run amuck. I have seen most of it in my own divorce, which cost 100s of thousands of dollars and took over 4 and 1/2 years to obtain a dissolution. The other lawyer filed many motions most of which were never acted upon, but were designed to frighten, intimidate and complicate the process and conflict. I have seen the collusion and corruption first hand. In this daily, drawn out and emotional conflict where we have completely lost control, it may be easy to get wrapped up and think that the lawyers and GALs are doing what they are supposed to be doing and that inciting conflict is just part for the course. Some of us might even win a battle or two, but in reality both myself and my ex wife, just like everyone who is here today, lost every time we fought in family court. We all lose. We lose financially, we lose our health, we lose our jobs, we lose our homes and our children. I personally have lost a business, I built and worked on over 20 years and a source of income, which has left me unemployed. But most importantly our three children have lost years of their childhood as pawns between two parents, the GAL, the lawyers and numerous counselors and therapists some of whom presumed parental incompetence and proceeded to make decisions for our children that were harmful and not in their best interest. Because of their age, the children seem to have lost trust in all the adults involved in their lives, which manifested in oppositional behavior and other behavioral issues.

Sadly, my children have also lost their father. Although I have been granted final decision on two of the children, due to systematic alienation from me as well as any therapists that were trying to prevent that from happening, I have not have any visitation with two of my children for over two years and I see one of them only occasionally. Losing a relationship with one parent is not in the best interest of the children. It is detrimental to their future, their emotional well being. Not only are they prevented to have any contact with me, but also with my side of the family. In my case the GAL was too busy pursuing his political aspirations so he made a superficial effort to do his job in order maintain the revenue stream. On a number of occasions our GAL has misrepresented the findings provided by the therapists to mislead the judge into an outcome he desired which allowed him to justify billing hours without actually committing his real time.

In an adversarial system such as the one we have all the abuse, collusion, corruption, good aggressive legal strategies get mixed together. As the conflict grows, people want a family lawyer to win. People want a lawyer that is networked, favored by judges and uses collusion to their advantage. Motions are filed, often without any knowledge, consultation or explanation. Services are brought in and experts are hired. It became difficult to tell the difference between an aggressive strategy or abuse, corruption or cleverness. The family lawyers may use this disparity to their client's advantage, which in the end provides only an illusion of a win and produces rulings that are complete failures.

You may wonder who in their right mind would choose this method to resolve a family issue when mediation is clearly the healthiest way to get a divorce. Who would bring their family matters into this mess? Are certain pathologies attracted to family court and do they value the service family court

provides? Many of us are trying to escape an abusive relationship by getting a divorce. The abuse comes in many forms. Physical, emotional and financial. Our only and best option is to get a divorce. Personally, I wanted to use mediation, but I got stuck in the family court system. I see no value in family court, however, my ex wife did. In fact she was determined to 'win' no matter what the cost to the family resources or the well being of our children. She may even argue that the system works, because it allowed her to accomplish two main goals, one, to destroy me financially and two to destroy my relationship with the children. In most of these egregious divorces, there are no ex-spouses testifying here today. Presumably, it is because family court provided a service for them and has helped them accomplish their goals no matter how unreasonable, self serving or destructive. The pathology of this broken, corrupt and abusive system is used and valued by the pathology of high conflict individuals and by the lawyers, GALs and others ready to maximize their profit. As some of us are trying to leave an abusive relationship, our abuser has the ultimate decision to select the abusive family court over mediation. The termination of the marriage will give them one last chance to use and abuse us. They can espouse revenge as we try desperately to cut all of our vulnerabilities to our ex spouses. Divorces last years, consume all financial resources and the battle over visitation and custody as well as child support and alimony are drawn out for many years after the divorce is completed. The first financial affidavit is a good predictor of how complicated and drawn out of a process one can expect.

Look at all the people and listen to the stories describing their victimization and failure in family court. What service does the family court provide? Is it a method to get the truth, is it to find justice or is it just a service for people who want to exact revenge and abuse their ex-spouse for as long as the system will allow for that to happen. Or is it simply a lucrative and unethical industry that navigates the broken system and uses pathology of at least one individual to trap families in a conflict to exploit them financially

The system is broken and I do not have the answers to fix it. I appreciate that mediation is an option for us and I believe encouraging or requiring more use of that practice is the best solution and should be encouraged. I would like to suggest that the committee sponsor a study to see who and what type of person values the existing family court process. There are theories that 80% of the cases in family court are a result of one or both people with a high conflict personality. Perhaps all litigants should be required to watch the movie DivorceCorp or even watch the video of this proceeding.

In conclusion, I believe that preventing exploitation of conflict will dramatically reduce family court caseload, it will prevent financial destruction of families and limit the burden family court currently has on the state budget. Most importantly, this reform will benefit the children, which the institution of the GALs was supposed to safeguard in the first place.

This is our life. Today you have witnessed only few of the many tragic stories of regular people who despite the fear of retaliation chose to share with you to help you understand the degree of the dysfunction and abuses that plague the family court system. I can guarantee that one of these stories you heard tonight can happen to you or your loved ones. Based on the testimonies you have heard, would you want to bring your family into this mess, which we call the CT Family Court system?

Thank you.